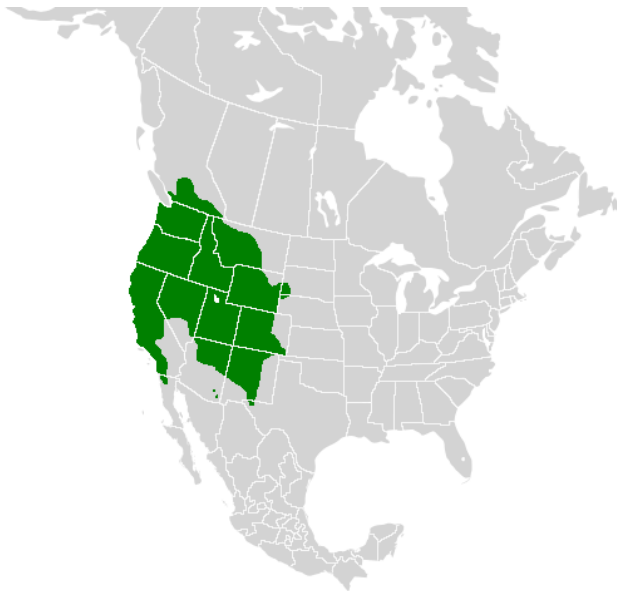


Tiger Swallowtails



Western tiger swallowtail. Photo courtesy of Greg Kareofelas.

The western tiger swallowtail, *Papilio rutulus*, is one of the more spectacular butterflies in California. Adults are brightly marked in yellow and black, with a single “tail” on each hindwing, and a series of blue and orange spots above it. They have a wingspan of 3-4 inches.



Distribution of the western tiger swallowtail (in green). Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and Megan McCarty.

These butterflies always seem to be in motion and can be seen flying in urban parks and gardens in addition to woodlands and riparian areas. Males are sometimes observed in groups landing on mud and sandy areas along streams and rivers, where they collect minerals and water. Adults visit a variety of plants for nectar including California buckeye, yerba santa, butterfly bush (*Buddleya*) and thistles.

The caterpillars can get quite large, reaching nearly 3 inches long just before they pupate. They feed on a variety of trees, including cottonwoods, sycamore, privet, willow, wild cherry, liquidamber, lilac and ash. The caterpillars change appearance as they grow and shed their skin. They molt five times before they pupate. Young caterpillars resemble bird droppings. As they grow they eventually become bright green with large eye spots and a transverse yellow and black band.

The bright colors and eyespots of the caterpillar help protect it from predation by birds.

These butterflies can have several generations a year. Females can lay up to 100 eggs in their lifetime. The eggs are laid singly on the surface of leaves of the plants they feed on. In the summer generation, adults can emerge in as little as two weeks after pupation.

The summer generation chrysalis is bright green. Later in the summer the chrysalis is brown and the adult does not emerge until the following spring, as early as February depending on the climate and latitude.



Mature western tiger swallowtail caterpillar.